

LOVE'S LABOUR WON

AN EVENTFUL STORY.

BY JAMES GRANT.

AUTHOR OF "THE ROMANCE OF WAR," "THE BLACK WATCH," "FAIRER THAN A FAIRY," ETC., ETC.

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CHAPTER XXXV.—ON THE IRRAWADDY.

The expedition for this purpose consisted of fully 11,000 men—ultimately, by July, increased to 24,184 men—led by Major-General Dalrymple Prendergast, a veteran officer, who served in the Persian campaign with Outram, in the wars of Central India with Lord Strathairn, was severely wounded in the battles of Mundaesore and Betwa, won the coveted V. C., had his horse shot under him at Ratchur, and was Field Engineer at the Conquest of Abyssinia.

Among the troops proceeding to Burma in this expedition were the Liverpool regiment (old 8th Foot) and the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, commanded respectively by Colonels Andrew Le Messurier, a Crimean veteran, and John Tilly, who had served with the 23d Fusiliers in the Indian Mutiny, and one of the captors of Lucknow. These battalions were the backbone of the Bengal contingent, while from Madras and elsewhere came the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers, Bedfordshire, Welsh Borderers, Middlesex and Hants, all Queen's regiments.

Except the Blue Jackets of the Indian squadron, all the rest were native troops, and all had orders to concentrate at Rangoon, where armed steamers and flat-bottomed barges were to be ready for transport service on the Irrawaddy, and forty-pounder guns—to batter the river ports—were to be placed in cargo boats.

Meanwhile, we heard that the Burmese were busy constructing earthworks, and had a gunboat laying down torpedoes at Mintha, and placing fire-rafts, and chains across the river to bar our passage.

The time given for the Burmese answer to the British ultimatum was to expire on the 5th of November (Guy Fawkes' Day), and hostilities were to commence on the 11th.

After the concentration at Rangoon, the expedition was at once to ascend the Irrawaddy and strike a vigorous blow at the forces of the inhuman Theebaw in the vicinity of Mintha, which was expected to be the scene of the first conflict.

Theebaw's reply was a long, unsatisfactory and hostile document, and he called upon all the loyal Burmese to fight for the white elephant, their country and religion, offering to lead them in person, and thus ensure victory while the slaughter of the invaders was not to begin until they crossed the frontier.

In British Burma were already the second Battalion of the Liverpool regiment, the Thirtieth, or Somersetshire Light Infantry, and the Royal Scots Fusiliers.

"I made this voyage once before, with our 2d Battalion," said Montessor, as he and Lonsdale trod the poop together, cigar in mouth; "and know we shall see the unwhipped shores of Burma to-morrow."

The current from Calcutta to Rangoon is about seven hundred and eighty miles, and the first point we sight is the Aguda Lighthouse. What strange things have happened to me since I saw it last!" he added.

That evening the muddy state of the water, through which the tall white tower gleamed, gave a gloomy aspect to the approach to the shores of Burma. The dark fluid proceeds from the chief mouth of the Irrawaddy, which has fourteen in all—not one too many for a river a thousand miles in length—the Nile of the white elephant.

At that season it flows so rapidly that it is almost impossible to get a boat to stem, were it not for the aid of the southwest monsoon, which sets in the opposite direction. Assisted by the wind, and constantly keeping within the eddies of the banks, the Burmese craft use their sails, and frequently achieve a more speedy passage at this period—i. e. from June to September—than at any other.

But it was naturally, as a soldier, who, in the first Burmese war, had aided the storming of the great bell-shaped Dagon Pagoda at Rangoon.

To Montague Lonsdale, the latter round edifice was an object of wonderful interest, when he saw it towering skyward to the height of 350 feet, and glittering in the sun, the largest "bell-tower" in the name imparting, in all India, China, and from its site, on the last spur of the Pegu Yoma range, visible for a vast distance round, whether the clang of its mighty bell, fourteen feet in height, can be sent.

From its summit he could see, as in a mass at his feet, groves of banyan and coconut trees, and the latter with dark green, containing monstrous images of Gaudama, some in sitting, some in sleeping positions, surrounded by others of priests and attendants in the act of worship; others of elephants, lions, angels and demons, and of objects altogether indescribable; elsewhere, swamps, rice fields, low lands, and the north, dense jungle, with the river flowing down, 800 yards in breadth and deep enough for laden ships of 1200 tons.

Such was the new and strange locality in which Lonsdale now found himself, with his comrades of the old Somersetshire, and elaborate descriptions of which he had more than one long letter to Melanie.

More than once during the brief period of inaction at Rangoon he had tormented dreams of her, born, doubtless, of his waking thoughts—at least he could but infer so; dreams of Melanie at his old Irish castle, under the great trees behind the stinging river on which the water lilies floated. She was not there with himself, he thought, but with old Sir Brisco; and once—he never forgot that dream—he seemed to see Stokencross church in the background, old, grey, and half hidden among the foliage; while amidst a group, the faces of which were of changing and indistinct under the aged lychgate, the figures of these two stood distinctly forth, Melanie pale as a lily, with her once brilliant violet eyes clouded and dull, Sir Brisco looking bright and triumphant, his arm round her, and his lips on her cheek, as he drew back her veil, a bridal one, apparently.

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Rangoon river, and the land was rising a little to starboard.

"Is it true," lisped Charlie Danvers, with the inevitable glass screwed into his right eye, "that the General has ordered the artillery to open on the stockades and other works with red-hot shells? Travers says so."

"That is very like Travers," replied an artillery officer, quite gravely; "but the bursting powder must be in, of course, before our shells are heated."

"Aw—aw—of course," said Danvers. "It was now well-known on board the squadron that the blood-stopped Theebaw intended to show us that he was no degenerate successor of that Alompra, who defeated the Pagan conqueror of his country and founded its dynasty; or that other King of Burma, who, when a missionary asked his permission to make converts from Buddhism, he replied: 'Convert me as you can; but I will not have my head cut off!'"

"So the missionary found little trouble in wanting the captives of the converted."

Theebaw proclaimed that he was to unfurl the Peacock Flag at the head of his troops, and notwithstanding his awful massacres and mad despotism, he seemed to certain people, with one small section of his people, and vowed he would treat them to the slaughter of certain British subjects whom he had in his hands—detained officers of the Irrawaddy Flotilla, whose heads he would hang upon trees, like so many coco-nuts.

He would arm about 30,000 men with rifles of various kinds, some being valuable flint-locks, some granted, perhaps, not to go off at all, or like some of those with which our English government arm the British troops, as perilous to those who handle them as to the enemy.

By this time he had cut the telegraph wires between Rangoon and Mandalay, at Mintha, and the troops for the expedition were to concentrate at the first named place and to advance boldly up the Irrawaddy, striking the initiative blow at Mintha.

CHAPTER XXXVI.—CANTONED AT RANGOON.

The second battalion of Lonsdale's regiment—Prince Albert's Somersetshire Light Infantry—had, as stated, been stationed for some time previous at Rangoon, where in a part of the barracks, and thus he and Montessor soon found themselves warmly welcomed by a circle of old friends and comrades.

Lonsdale, proud of his corps—as what true soldier is not—had often looked with ardour at its colors as they floated out on the wind, covered with honors won in other wars, and now as they floated against "the sons of feeble men," like the wretched Burmese of Theebaw, and when the embroidered silk, with the Sphinx and Mural Crown, was of the old days; when, on going into action, the first orders were:

"Gentlemen! Uncase the colours. Examine your flints and primings!"

"Do not let the old colours of a regiment," asks a writer, "faded with age, tattered and stained out of all their early beauty, bring to us a sigh of loving tribute to the glories so present to the spirit—so little discernible now."

And colors they were, still of the old day, long service and veteran soldiers not of the weedy boys, that die like flies when hardships come—days of the "Old Red Rag," that tells of Britain's glory, and when the white khaki, that suggests only the garb of a convict, was unknown.

And now for a bit of unknown history. The Somersetshire regiment, about which we may have some recollections, was raised by Theophilus, seventh Earl of Huntingdon, in the troublesome year 1685, for King James—the same peer whose house, as a noted loyalist, was searched by the Williamites in 1692, for papers which he had burned; but in whose studies were found books enough to make a son of a century and a half had been succeeded in the memorable year of the revolution by his son Ferdinand Hastings. Then came the Earl of Bannockburn, as colonel in the truce of the Union; Stanhope Cotton in the year of Sherifdar; Harry Pulteney in the days of Marlborough and Culloden; and to these old memories it added more recent glories won in every quarter of the globe; and it was perhaps the last corps in Her Majesty's service to use the old flint-lock musket, with which its soldiers, under the gallant Sir Robert Sale, the veteran of Malloy, fought their way through Khyber Passes down to Icalabad in 1841—Sale, the same old soldier, who, in the first Burmese war, had aided the storming of the great bell-shaped Dagon Pagoda at Rangoon.

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name for myself that will make Claire admire me as much as I know she loves me."

"My poor Montessor," said Lonsdale, laughing at the visions in his head, "I will not let you go on like this; but in the meantime, let me tell you that the milt of the Mahdi's warriors; but their bullets may be quite as perilous as if fired by actual heroes."

"Is it not strange, Travers," lisped Danvers, as these two made their way to the parade through the streets of bungalows, "strange to think that there should have been such a list of wounded—badly hit fellows—at Chawingher; and that the seductive little widow should be his wife after all?"

"A devil of a deaco," commented Travers, as they passed Montessor, who was all unconscious that he was the cause of either of the two speakers' remarks.

"We shall have to see some sharp work, I hope before to-morrow night," said he to Lonsdale, as they threw aside their cigars and joined the parade in the dark; "to-morrow and to-morrow creep in our petty space from day to day—"

"True, and who can tell what it may bring forth for some of us? I remember Lonsdale, whose recent dream haunted him uncomfortably."

CHAPTER XXXVII.—THE STORMING OF MINTHA.

The waning moon of the cool early morning was tipping with its pale silvery light the wonderful arabesque carvings of the great Shoe Dagon Pagoda that towered above the soft summering mist exhaled from the marsh and steam, and from the damp clumps of heavy mangroves, the drooping into both, when Lonsdale and Montessor left their quarters in the cantonment at Rangoon to join the river expedition against Mintha.

The thoughts of the former were still full of his strange and unpleasant dream of Melanie Talbot, and of that time in London, when in a part of the West End ballroom there had come into the hearts of both the one great dawn of passion that can never return again, when each was drawn to the other by an irresistible power, though the word "love" had been unuttered; and when Melanie felt herself face to face with her old lover, like Lonsdale, that she had met her fate, and then came the memory of their parting hour.

In the morning wind the golden leaves attached to the corners of the vast pagoda were moving, and there, too, were tossing and rigging the sweet-toned bells that hang among the rich golden leaves of the Dagon Pagoda, strange features of a face, built in an age unknown, and which, when viewed by moonlight, seems the abode of magic and mystery, surrounded by winged monsters with solemn countenances, tranquil mien, and panting lips.

Thoughts of a more practical nature came on Lonsdale, when he saw the dawn break, quickly on the river and its wooded banks, and he reflected that what happen what might, as the Flotilla steamed up the muddy Irrawaddy, the people at home, so many thousand miles away, would know all about it; who were the wounded and who were the slain—ere, perhaps, twelve hours were over.

It was the morning of the 17th November, when the vessels with the Liverpool regiment—as the old Eighth or King's, is now grotesquely named—the Twentieth and Twenty-fifth Madras Native Infantry, both in scarlet, the former faced with buff, the latter with dark green, someappers, and a Royal Artillery battery, were landed at the village of Patnago, five miles below a fort, which was to be carried by assault; but the trouble of doing so was obviated by the garrioon "levelling," and soon as our troops came in sight, after undergoing some brilliant shelling, however.

A point was thus turned and won with ease, and other troops came on—to wit—the Second and Eleventh Bengal Infantry, under Colonels Baker and Norris, and the Twelfth Madras; and then the march began, in the direction of Mintha, near which was the most formidable defence and barrier of the river, the Kuligon Fort, a mile below the town.

Being ordered to ride forward and reconnoitre, Lonsdale, after some scouts had been fired on and driven in, saw that it stood on an isolated hill, about 300 feet above the level of the river, and that its guns commanded a long and straight reach of the latter.

The slope, which was defended by three lines of earthworks faced with brick, was gentle, but there were other defences, formed of huge teak logs, backed up by earth and brick ramparts, so solid as to defy our artillery, and, as he reported to the general, the largest "bell-tower" in the name imparting, in all India, China, and from its site, on the last spur of the Pegu Yoma range, visible for a vast distance round, whether the clang of its mighty bell, fourteen feet in height, can be sent.

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enclosure, containing many pagodas, and flanked on two sides by a great tank and an earthenwork twelve feet in height.

It was attacked on two points by the Eleventh Bengal Infantry, under Drury and Stuart. The latter were gallantly storming over the stockades, but the first named officer, Lieutenant Ashton Drury, a fine young subaltern of the South Wales Borderers (attached to the Bengal corps), fell dead—the first officer killed in the new campaign—while Lieutenant Selkirk of the Inniskillies, similarly attached, was wounded along with several Sepoys.

Lonsdale, whom the Bengaleses followed closely, for discipline apart, he had the air of a man born to command, had a narrow escape in this wretched jungle warfare, as a wounded Burmese, in his death agony, half raising himself from the blood-slurpy grass, with his sharp dagger, or chopper, made a savage stab at him. A Bengalee parried the thrust with his rifle, and then blew out the creature's brains.

Charlie Danvers also had an escape. Blinded by the smoke of some blazing bamboo houses, he lost his way, and fell among some Burmese huts, but was too much of an Englishman not to be equal to the occasion. He cut down two, emptied his revolver among the rest, but stumbled and fell, when a heap of others were piled over him, killed and wounded, whose blood plastered him from head to foot, to his great disgust. Between gore and grime he presented a terrible appearance, and emerged from under them with a very fair face, for Charlie was a natty and vain young fellow—vain of the whiteness of his hands, his straw-colored moustache and somewhat rapid countenance.

An attack had lasted three-quarters of an hour, during which the shot from rifled brass guns of the Burmese rang incessantly through the dense leafy jungle, shredding away the foliage into flakes, till our stormers swept over the place, and the village, with all its painted pagodas, was given to the flames; and the great sheet of these bamboo houses burned fiercely, the result of the conflagration almost drowning the fiendish yells of the Burmese.

"Forward!" was now the order, and the troops, full of fervor, pressing over some open ground beyond advanced against the Fort of Mintha, into which the shells from the river was throwing her shells with beautiful precision.

The works were girt by thick jungle, and full of armed Burmese, over whose fantastic helmets eleven guns and two wall pieces, from the higher ramparts, were pouring grape, despite which a small party, led by Lieutenants Downes and Wilkinson of the Twelfth, and other officers including Montessor, armed with his sword and a brace of revolvers, as he was always terribly in earnest about anything he undertook to do, reached the foot of the slope, which was covered by one very formidable piece of cannon.

"Waiting until the gun at the head of the rampart had discharged its periodical roar of grape," wrote one who was present, "these officers led their men to a most gallant and successful assault. They met with a sharp resistance at the top of the incline, and poor Wilkinson had his skull cut through with a dao, or heavy knife—a very dangerous weapon. His conduct, and that of Downes, were conspicuously to the front, deserves recognition. The Burmese were quickly cut up in a terrible degree—as they were massed together both on the rampart and in the courtyard below—by the fire of our breech-loaders, and as they rushed out to the river bank on the east they were met by a party of our men, and suffered severely; in fact, very few escaped alive. I suppose a hundred were killed outright here, a number wounded, and 150, or 200, made prisoners."

The Burmese commander here was a ruffian who had been notoriously zealous in the Burmese massacres; and his troops were the King's mamluks, whose helmets were surmounted by gilt anchors, in lieu of the ordinary red moulted dragon of the line.

The Italians in Theebaw's service now exploded a mine from the other side of the river, by which the armed launch was blown to the air, and a few more, but after a three-hour conflict, Mintha was ours.

The whole town, including the Governor's palaces, perished in a conflagration caused by the shells from the launch.

When the firing ceased, and the dead and wounded were being reckoned and lists made up for the general, Montessor shook hands with each other, congratulating each other, and a sad sequel was in store for both ere long, when under fire again.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.—HOME.

And now for a brief glance at what was then passing at Rose Cottage and Ravensbourne Hall.

The days were drawing in, and the sombre gloomings came early. Many of the leaves were dull and sullen, with a sleepy shyness, and the wind, which at night through the lofty and leafless trees that overhung the cottage.

The swine were rooting in the desolate cornfields among the black, or brown, decaying stubble, and the noisy ducks came, dirty and dragged from the muddy pools, that were half choked with fallen leaves, to the water.

It was toward the end of a genuine English November, when the rain raineth every day, and frowzy fogs, like those of Holland, envelop all the low-lying and ill-drained land.

The Thames was shorn of its sylvan beauty, and the trying place, on which the mounds of Lonsdale's camp were away amid the rice swamps of the Rangoon river, dwelt so fondly, was no longer a place of rich grass, sweet flowers and sunshine, but one instinct with the deathly odor of rotting decay and slimy waterfalls; so Melanie Talbot went near it no more; it seemed so gloomy and desolate, and indicated the present anxiety and future hopelessness; and if here and there a flower lingered in the once pretty garden of the cottage, it seemed to stand, as someone says, above its dead companions like a mourner over a grave, waiting for Mother Earth to receive it also.

Her brother Reginald was still at the hall, where all the medical ethics brought by Sir Brisco, to bear upon his case, had failed to achieve any amendment thereof, and where, now, his visit was drawing to a close. He longed to be with Melanie, who never went over to the hall, and he felt that in conscience he could stay there no longer, even at the risk of the old pressure being put upon Melanie by Mrs. Chillingham and Uncle Grimshaw; and where, latterly, he had, of a necessity, been much left to himself by Sir Brisco, after the pleasant shooting began and the hunting season set in—as the baronet was not so old or so obese as to relax his interest in the sport, though occasionally advised to do so by his medical man. Thus Reginald had been much left to his own thoughts, his unavailing repining about Amy Brendon, to his books, and the kindly care of old Mrs. Mopps, the housekeeper.

Dick's introduction of a wasp's nest into the immediate vicinity of his stable, and the fact that the wasp was not forgiven for that gentleman, who was quietly waiting for a time to pay the boy off in revenge, and get rid of him; and ere long the occasion came.

Mr. Grimshaw's postal institution, the dispatch box, had never yet produced one letter from Lonsdale, in answer to the many that Melanie had deposited therein

addressed to every available point of his outward voyage; and now, though she had ceased to write, in sheer despair of his knew not what, she never failed to scan the papers for military news from India, and latterly from Burma, and had sent all notices of the departure of the Bengal column to join the army of General Prendergast.

Then came tidings of the capture of Mintha, the first brief dispatch received at the India Office from His Excellency, the Viceroy, to the effect that the barrier part of the river had been captured, after three hours' conflict, with thirteen guns; that the town had been accidentally burned down; that a steam launch had been captured and that the casualties would follow.

The casualties! What a bitter pang those two words gave her heart! But how hopefully and proudly he had been, a day or two after, came fuller details, that included a notice of the gallant Captain Montessor of the Twelfth Native Infantry, who had reconnoitered the enemy's works within rifle-shot, and at the head of a detachment had stormed, at the point of the bayonet, a fortified village on the right flank of the position. Tidings with which, in a tumult of thought, he rushed to the Viceroy, to show to his friend and gossip, little Amy Brendon.

Amy had become her own joyous, active and bright self again, with her quick, rippling hair and dark, laughing eyes. With renewed lightness of spirits, her naturally splendid health had come back to her, and among her father's old parlour scenes she had, as formerly, plenty of occasion to show her skill in the time of Horace Musgrave should return to Stokencross, as his letters—though his illness was protracted—now assured her he was hourly longing to do.

His kinsman's wife—the same kinsman whose initials had created such confusion and consternation—the fair and fond child, who had reduced the art of coquetry to science at their own house, was now, after a long absence, back in the house, and had also assured her that Horace was recovering certainly, but slowly, "he had got such a deuce of a shaking and pounding in that awful spill at the hurdle race;" thus more than the brief ten days he had allotted to himself.

Would have to elapse before he was fairly on his legs again, and it for duty or travelling; so, meanwhile, the marriage was still delayed—a fact ominous of disaster, as all old ladies alleged—and Reginald Talbot, sooth to say, cared not how long the delay was; yet thought, meanwhile, that his emotions on the subject were somewhat akin to those of the dog in the manger.

Then Amy, in the excess of her revulsion of spirits, after discovering that her lover was true, was tempted to be more than usually kind and effusive in her bearing to the unfortunate young soldier, when she met him abroad in his wheel chair, and this new manner of her's, all unconscious as she was of it, seemed to her to tantalize and torture—though it did not deceive—him.

"Ah," said her mother, as one day, with fond and caressing eyes, she watched Amy, while the latter stood before a mirror over the mantel-board, gazing at her plump back and toward to swell the hair and curls, "fringe, 'I think the greatest vocation a girl can have is to be a clergyman's wife, and when I trained you, my little one, up for it—or thought I did—"

"Yes, thought you did, mamma; but a Hussar came, and there was an end of the vocation," interrupted the old vicar, laughing.

The small, but happy, circle at the vicarage, shared to the full the satisfaction and pleasure which Melanie had at last been through the prosaic medium of the public prints, heard of her fiancé, and the laudation his courage had won.